DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 161 288 FL 009 812

TITLE English Language Teaching Prcfile: Sultanate of Oman.
INSTITUTION British Council, London (England). English-Teaching Information Centre.
PUB DATE Jul 78
NOTE 7p.; May not reproduce well due to light type

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Instructional Materials; *Language Instruction; *Language Pole; Language Teachers; Second Language Learning; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Oman

ABSTRACT

This profile in outline form of the English language teaching situation in the Sultanate of Oman examines the role of English in society and in the educational system. The predominance of English as the most important foreign language is noted, and its status as a compulsory subject in elementary and secondary school is discussed. The composition and qualifications of the teaching cadre are treated as well as instructional materials, English outside the educational system, British support for the teaching of English, and American invclvement since 1973 with the Peace Corps. A general statement on the strengths and weaknesses of the system concludes the profile. (AMH)

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ENGLISH TEACHING INFORMATION CENTRE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

Country: SULTANATE OF OMAN

July 1978

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1. Role of English

English is the most important foreign language in Oman, partly because of the residual political influence of Britain but mainly because of its position as an international language. With such a large expatriate presence, European and Asian, it is the lingua franca of commerce. At director level and above in Government and Ministerial circles one can carry on a two-way correspondence in English and one has little trouble in conversational exchange. An added impetus to English is the presence of a large number of Omanis of East African origin whose mother tongue is Swahili closely followed by English, while their Arabic is often non-existent.

1.1 For purposes of work most middle level employees in the Ministries need some English. Because of this the Civil Service, and indeed most major concerns, pay for English language instruction for employees and promotion is often earned by successful completion of courses. It is, therefore, English for occupational purposes.

2. English Within the Educational System

English is taught as a compulsory subject in all schools from the fourth year of the elementary cycle through to the Third Year of Secondary. 4-6 periods per week are allocated to English.

2.1 The place of English in the exam system is a fairly important one in that it is a necessary pass for promotion from the preparatory to the secondary cycle and is a condition for the award of Tawjiheah. A GCE pilot scheme has, however, been introduced at Secondary level for 30 of the best Preparatory students in the country. They are being taught through the medium of English and will take, in 2-3 years time, the London GCE Board examinations in English, Mathematics and Science. Other UK examinations, First Certificate Cambridge and RSA and GCE are taught at the British Council Centre.

2.2 No tertiary level establishment exists in Oman and those who have been awarded the Tawjiheah leave for Arab universities and, more increasingly, the USA and Britain. Those intending to study in the USA are required to have TEOFL at least after a one-year stay.

2.3 The syllabus is centrally controlled and the text books are selected by the Ministry of Education. To date, LEAW, heavily supplemented by materials prepared by the Inspectors of English, is in use, but 1978-79 will see the pilot edition of Longmans English for Oman. Only the Inspectorate have a say in the choice of textbooks, teachers are spoonfed in the use of books and are therefore rarely consulted. Only the GCE project can decide what English books will be used without consultation.

2.4 The Inspectors are the policemen of the schools. It is their duty to see books are distributed, schools have teachers, provide supplementary exercises, prepare examinations and, if time permits, actual in service teacher training. Each Inspector of English reports not only to his area Education Officer but to a Chief Inspector (KELT incumbent) and his local counterpart.

2.5 To date there has been no English for specific purposes in the schools. This may change with the opening of the new technical/ vocational colleges in 1980.

2.6 The Ministry of Education runs an evening class programme for adults who have not had the opportunity to attend schools as well as for those who have 'dropped out' of the system. English is taught as a subject as in the main school system. A recently opened Institute of Public Administration is to run English Language courses after office hours for Ministry employees.

2.7 To date little or no use has been made of broadcasting in the educational field. The English Service of the Radio is allotted only a small percentage of time on the air.

3. Teachers of English

Throughout the Lower Gulf and in particular Oman, the great majority of all teachers, including teachers of English, are expatriate - 403 out of 2,878 in 1977. The majority of this majority are Arab expatriate, mainly Egyptian and Palestinian. In addition, the British Council has recruited nineteen teachers of English for the Preparatory and Secondary schools.

Qualifications.

For the teachers, the figures tell most of the story, but not all. 69.5% of all teachers employed in Oman in 1972 had completed secondary school or its equivalent or less. "Or its equivalent" is a necessary qualification since many Arab countries offer, in the last 2 years of secondary school, a teacher-training option as well as arts and science, and some of the 69.5% are in this category. Of the Omani teachers, who in 1972 made up 57.2% of the teaching force, 95.1% had reached secondary level or less. This means that with the exception of those 11.6% who took the teacher-training option at secondary level, the 69.5% had no teacher training whatsoever. 8.3% of all teachers at the time these figures were collected were without any educational qualifications whatsoever, not even a primary school certificate. A further 6.8% had completed primary but no more; 13.7% had embarked on intermediate education but not completed it; 6.5% had completed it; and 11% had embarked on secondary education but not completed it. Of the who teaching force, only 19.9% had full secondary education plus a 2-year teacher training course, the odd 0.9% had full secondary education plus a 2-year teacher training course, the odd 0.9% being Omanis. In 1973 the figures looked rather better, since the total teaching force had increased from 735 to 1225, the new teachers being practically entirely expatriate Arabs. In 1974 a further 1200 foreign teachers were recruited. The number of Omani teachers remains constant or decreases, so in 1975/76 just over 29% of all teachers had secondary certificates or less instead of 69.5%.

Full professional status is accorded those who are either teacher trained or have degrees. A great proportion of the teachers of English in Oman meet these requirements: almost without exception the Arab expatriate teachers of English are at least teacher trained with English as their special subject though at Primary level here some of the teachers do not have specialised English training.

3.1 A Head of English department is being recruited for the new Teacher Training College due to open February 1979. He will take up the post in September 1978 and be responsible for setting up the department.

3.2 In service training and indeed teacher training has always been handicapped in that no TTC has existed. Moreover, the size of Oman (and the lack of accommodation) has effectively prevented courses being arranged on a regular basis in area centres. Inspectors tend to do in service training on the spot, particularly at the beginning of each year. The Longman's Course for Oman now includes in service training for a number of Omanis each year in the UK at the University of Reading during the summer recess.

3.3 There are no local professional organizations for teachers of English.

4. Materials Support

The basic textbook to date has been and will continue to be for some levels, LEAW published by Longmans. The book is reasonably well produced and universally available. The books are, in fact, a gift from Qatar. Difficulties arise at the start of every year when insufficient copies have been ordered and when allocations for the areas have been mishandled. This is an annual occurrence often to the detriment of schools in the remoter area who may go without for some time.

The teachers' book accompanying LEAW can not be explicit enough for the general standard of teacher. Likewise when supplementary materials are prepared, detailed teaching notes must accompany them.

Visual aids are sadly missing from the classroom apart from those wall charts accompanying LEAW and the folder composition by Donn Byrne Guided Comprehension. The necessary materials for constructing visual aids are often difficult to obtain and when available are rather expensive. In the main, however, teachers are too lethargic to devote time and effort to such a task.

The Longman Structural Readers are an integral part of the syllabus from the First Year. In addition, the ODM book box scheme has proved to be a successful enterprise in that it provides variety.

First Year English	P LEAW Bk 1	Lesson 1 - 25
Second " "	P LEAW Bk 1	Complete
Third " "	LEAW Bk 2	Lesson 1 - 17
Fourth " "	LEAW Bk 2 EC PPC	Lesson 17 - 22
Fifth " "	LEAW Bk 3 EC PPC	Lesson 1 - 11
Sixth " "	LEAW Bk 4 GCE EC	Lesson 1 - 10
Seventh " "	LESC Bk 1	Lesson 1 - 10
Eighth " "	LESC Bk 2 Elem. Scient. Engineering Practice.	
Ninth " "	LESC Bk 3 ESS	

And Longman Structural Readers at All Levels.

See Key to Abbreviations.

Key to abbreviations:

LEAW Stannard Allen: Living English for the Arab World (Longmans)
LESC Stannard Allen: Living English Secondary Course (Longmans)
EC Heaton & Methold: Effective Comprehension (Longmans)
GCE D.H. Spenser: Guided Composition Exercises (Longmans)
PPC Bryne: Progressive Picture Composition (Longmans)

5. English Outside the Educational System

There is a great and growing demand in Oman for the teaching of English outside the educational system. Petroleum Development (Oman) have their own teachers (Omani) but unable to cope with the demand send employees to the British Council centre or Polyglot. The same applies to the Ministry of Defence. Next year the Institute of Public Administration is to open English classes for restricted numbers of Ministry employees. In the main, however, they will continue at the British Council.

5.1 Most of the teachers of English in industry are employed on contract from Polyglot. In Oman, Polyglot's main concentration is on the teaching of Arabic but English is one of their subjects. The number of students actually studying in the Polyglot school is negligible, their concentration being on contracts. The standard of teaching at Polyglot is fair though the commercial aspect dominates.

5.2 Little is done in the way of English for specific purposes as the standard of English is so low. Most teaching of English is geared to achieving a threshold level. In the Ministry of Defence the concentration tends to be on lexis but elsewhere it is of a general nature.

6. British Support for the Teaching of English

6.1 ELT Section Ministry of Education.

Chief Inspector of English KELT
Materials Producer KELT (78)
Inspector of English (Battinah)
(Sharquia)
(Interior)
(South)

2 Senior Teachers of English (female) Cat. IV Apptmts.	Girls Sec. & Prep School (capital)
3 Senior Teachers of English (male) Cat. IV	Boys Sec. School (capital & Salalah)
10 Junior Teaching Posts at Prep.level. (in the Areas)	Guaranteed

1 Head of English TTC - KELT (for 1978-9)

1 Audio Visual Expt. TTC - KELT (for 1978-9)

Royal Guard Regiment school - 5 teachers of English (guaranteed)

The main ELT activities of British staff is teaching at the higher levels preparatory and secondary and in inspection work. The tendency will be to move away from teaching completely - Cat. IV posts are due to terminate in 1980. All supplementary work in English has been done by British staff though there are Omani personnel in the ELT section.

No work has yet been done on radio and TV but the BBC series On We Go is planned for 1978-79.

One ELT book Exhibition has been staged this year at the British Council which was well attended. In addition, the British Council brought an Audio Visual expert to Oman for the benefit of the Ministry of Education. Miss Read gave a series of lecture-demonstrations on the making of visual aids throughout the Sultanate.

The British Council Class Programme has up to 700 classes both on and off the premises. Two UK recruited teachers and one locally engaged teacher handle most of the contract work - with organizations such as the Royal Oman Police, Research Department, Ministry of Information. In the Centre, the teachers are in the main ELT qualified expatriate wives (five in all). Many of the students are sent by the employers, the Civil Service, the larger companies and the Armed forces though an increasing number are self sponsored. Classes are at all levels from beginners to GCE, the concentration being at elementary and intermediate level. Special classes are organized for ladies in the mornings if they cannot attend the mixed classes in the evening. A wide variety of textbooks are used together with all the latest audio visual equipment - overhead projectors and language laboratory.

7. American Support for the Teaching of English

American involvement in ELT in Oman dates from 1973 with the American Peace Corps. The TOEFL and the Michigan Tests are conducted by a visiting examiner based in the Gulf though the British Council are occasionally asked to test on the Embassy's behalf.

The Peace Corps has increased in numbers over the years and now has approximately 17 volunteers teaching English in Oman. These teachers often work together with the Council recruited Junior teachers in the provinces while the more experienced Peace Corps volunteer has occasionally been assigned as Asst. Inspector to the ODM Inspector of English.

8. Current Research and Bibliography

There is now a recently produced Educational Profile of Oman as well as a translation of the Ministry of Education 5-year plan.

9. General Statement

There is little that can be added to what has been said in the Profile about ELT in the Lower Gulf.

9.1 The main strength of ELT in the Representation is the increasing recognition at all levels of society of the importance of English for development and for communication. Ministries of Education and other development Ministries are vexed by the poor standard of English attained by school leavers. Industries and commercial institutions are searching for ways of improving the English of their employees. People are offering themselves voluntarily for further tuition in English.

9.2 Many facturs contribute to making ELT in the Representation less effective than it might be.

- There is an in-built conservatism, particularly among Arab expatriate teachers but not only among them, which leads to inertia. Changes in methodology are alow to take hold, so that many teachers for example will still not adopt wholeheartedly the oral approach even though it is recommended in the textbook.

- Allied to this resistance to change is an almost Koranic belief and dependence on the textbook which is treated not only as a vade mecum but as a definitive encyclopaedia of English language and method.

- Many of the teachers are non-trained or poorly trained or were trained so long ago that their methods belong to a different era. Present in-service schemes only nibble at the problem.

- Teacher training facilities in Oman are ludicrously inadequate.

- The level of spoken English competence of many of those teachers who are not themselves native speakers is very low. Their inadequacy is inevitably transferred to their pupils. Moreover, the teachers' reading and writing skills are not deeply enough mastered to allow them to teach these skills with ease and flexibility.

- Syllabuses are often sparse and lacking in much needed guidance.

- There is little encouragement for teachers to write their own supplementary material and very little central provision of the needed materials.

- Though student motivation is seen to be high in the early stages of learning English, it dwindles rapidly before the onslaught of boring lessons and undirected language use.

- In all the systems it seems to be more important that the teacher finishes the textbook than that the pupils master what is in it. The extreme centralisation of syllabuses is, in this area, incompatible with any attempt at child-centred learning.